

Conservation buffers: boon to fish and wildlife

Head and shoulders
Photo of DC or
Soil Conservationist
here

By _____,
District Conservationist, Natural
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Conservation buffers are strips of grass, trees or shrubs, or a combination of them. As the name implies, a buffer provides a cushion, or buffer, between intensive farming operations and other lands or waterways.

There are a number of practices that are called buffers. Most common are grass filter strips or grass, shrub and tree riparian plantings along a stream.

Contour grass strips in a crop field, farmstead and field windbreaks, and grass field borders are also considered buffers.

A primary reason many landowners establish buffers is to improve water quality. The grass or other vegetation slows runoff waters, allowing sediment and farm chemicals to settle out into the buffer rather than shoot full speed into streams, lakes or reservoirs.

Because the buffer is between the water body and the farm field, farming operations are also kept at arms length from the water body, meaning chemical and other field applications take place away from the stream.

Food and cover. The new vegetation established in a buffer is an opportunity for new sources of food and cover for wildlife. Native plants, forbs and legumes recommended by the Natural Resources Conservation Service provide the foods many wildlife

species want. The recommendations also consider the winter cover that can be provided. A buffer may be ideal as habitat, because it often borders a food source on one side-- the crop field-- and water on the other.

Widths critical. While there isn't much question that new strips of vegetation can attract wildlife, there is a question of whether wildlife can survive in a buffer. Since most buffers are long, narrow strips, they are more easily combed by predators. Bird nesting success generally drops off in buffers compared to larger habitat blocks. The wider a buffer, the better.

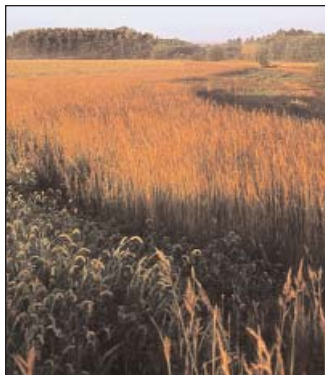
Plant diversity. As a rule, more plant diversity means more wildlife diversity. Researchers from Iowa State University found five times as many species of birds in a riparian buffer of grasses, shrubs and trees as had existed in a non-buffered pasture before buffer establishment.

USDA/NRCS offers technical and financial help in establishing conservation buffers.

For more information, stop at our office at _____(Number) _____(Street) in _____(city) , or visit the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov

Or, visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute website at

www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov



A strong majority of farmers and ranchers want to see wildlife on their land, and are willing to enhance habitat.

Wildlife Ways Did you know....



More than 80% of Americans value privately owned farms and ranches for the wildlife they produce. People are more concerned about wildlife being properly managed on farms and ranches than they are about whether they can hunt or fish.